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ABSTRACT

Strong school board-administrator relations are based on a clear understanding of the superintendent's responsibilities and regular, periodic evaluation. Few school boards have a formal method for evaluating superintendents, though many boards agree that evaluation is important for administrative accountability. A written set of evaluation goals and objectives, a list of administrator responsibilities, and procedural rules for evaluation of the superintendent should be written into school board policy thus establishing a strong base for healthy school board-administrator relations. (DW)

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SPEAKER: Philip B. Swain, President, National School Boards Association, Seattle, Wash.

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It is my distinct pleasure to speak with you both as a representative of the Seattle Board of Education and as President of the National School Boards Association. And I am grateful for the opportunity to take up a very important subject with you this afternoon. Last month, NSBA conducted surveys to determine the training needs of new school board members. Eighty percent of the board members, presidents and superintendents who responded gave the relationship between board and administrator top priority. In fact, they ranked the need for good superintendent/board relations above all other skill and knowledge requirements of school board members. To me those good relations are founded on two premises. First, there must be a clear understanding between the board and the superintendent as to what responsibilities each has. And second, based on that understanding, there must be a willingness to sit down periodically and evaluate how well those responsibilities are being carried out. Our panel meets to discuss one part of this process -- "How Board Members Evaluate the Superintendent." (Maybe in April we will let Vaughn Phelps come tell how superintendents evaluate board members when we meet in Miami Beach.)

In recent years, there has been a continuous flow of literature on this topic wrapped in the context of educational accountability, performance contracting and management by objectives. As of last spring, nine states had already mandated evaluation.

Despite the popular concern for "being accountable," not much is being done, by school districts, in the way of formal evaluation of the superintendent. In 1972, Lila N. Carol, then a Fellow of the National Program for Educational leadership, conducted A Study of Methods For Evaluating Chief School Officers in Local School Districts for the New Jersey School Boards Association. In her study of 216 responding New York and New Jersey districts, Ms. Carol found that only eight percent had any formal methods of evaluation. In November of 1972, the Educational Research Service could find only five articles addressing the subject of superintendent evaluation (one of which had appeared in The American School Board Journal.) ERS conducted an extensive study during which requests were sent to 581 large school districts, asking for procedures used in evaluating their superintendents. Although thirty-one percent of the systems claimed they practiced superintendent evaluation on a regular basis, only eight percent of the school districts utilized formal methods with forms or guidelines. This is not to judge how many had good or effective methods.

One can speculate on why this might be so. There are several possible reasons why so few school boards use formal evaluation techniques. Perhaps some boards deem evaluation unnecessary, inappropriate or dangerous. "Don't rock the boat; people will become hostile if they are suddenly held accountable," might be a popular attitude.

Sometimes the superintendent is opposed to performance evaluation. Poor administrators should fear the process; competent managers should thrive on it.

A school board might not be geared up to think systematically about executive performance, or any other staff performance. Board members are like other people; they need to learn how to evaluate objectively, how to use systematic approaches in measuring success and failure.

In many cases, the board prefers informality to structured evaluation methods and criteria. One often hears board members and administrators alike laud the casual atmosphere of their relationships with one another. "We work best by just getting together and talking things over every once in a while," is a very popular stance.

It seems to me, and also to NSBA, that superintendent evaluation is only a part of a much larger and century-long issue. What should be the roles and relationship of the board and superintendent in a district? Ever since the position of superintendent came into being, this relationship and these roles have been defined, argued and redefined.

NSBA believes certain generalizations about the board/superintendent relationship hold; our delegate assembly develops resolutions and policies which we feel are necessary for successful functioning of the education process. "Because the National School Boards Association recognizes the responsibility of local school boards to be accountable to students, parents, taxpayers, and the general public, it therefore urges local boards to establish accountability criteria and evaluate teacher and administrator performance."[1] We have also taken the position that "School Boards should adopt clearly defined written policies...."[2] The school board's role is that of policymaker and evaluator. Recently, Senator Frank Church, appearing on the Today Show, stated that after Congress passes a policy, it has the duty of overseeing -- making sure the policy is carried out. The School board's role is analagous to the duty of Congress. When a school board formulates policy for a district, it bears the responsibility of overseeing -- evaluating the administration of its policy. An important task, central to fulfilling this role, is superintendent evaluation on a regular basis because clearly the superintendent is the figure most responsible for administrating board policy.

While NSBA considers the board and administration jointly accountable for the effective functioning of the school system, within this broad generalization there can be many styles of relationship. NSBA has not prescribed evaluation techniques. What I am emphasizing here is the necessity for written, established evaluation procedures, irrespective of how a particular board and administrator work together. A district may have a passive board with an aggressive superintendent or vice versa. Some boards are comprised of strong leaders, while many are not. But, regardless of what the board/superintendent relationship is, evaluation should not be left to chance. Regardless of the style that is established, it is desirable for all parties that procedures for evaluating the superintendent (as well as other staff) be written into school district policy. This procedure ought to be written down. Criteria and methods for evaluation can also be written into the administrator's contract, which has the effect of policy. In 1974, The Charlottesville Public Schools in Virginia developed superintendent evaluation policy, along with an appraisal instrument and composite profile graph. These written documents provide guideposts and performance objectives for the administrator, a rating scale to measure how specific criteria were met, and a chart on which to plot the picture of the superintendent's overall performance. In 1971, the Mississippi Educational Services Center prepared

1 1974 NSBA Resolutions, 4.2.1 D

2 1974 NSBA Beliefs and Policies, Article III, Section 1.2.

"A Manual for Developing Reasonable, Objective, Nondiscriminatory Standards for Evaluating Administrator Performance,"[1] which is helpful to school districts initiating evaluation procedures. Another useful set of criteria for evaluating administrators can be found in the Statement of Ethics, developed by a task force which included AASA representatives.

As many of you probably know, NSBA recently completed a program for boards and administrators which we call BOARD ACTION. This available through NSBA, many state school boards associations ans some school districts and universities. BOARD ACTION is a program about the relationship between boards and administrators, the larger issue I mentioned earlier. One and half years ago, when BOARD ACTION was being developed, we realized that this relationship is crucial to the operation of every school district. BOARD ACTION is a six to eight hour experience, which we cannot go through this afternoon. But htere is one segment of it which is germaine to our topic. In Experience III, Superintendent Sanders, who has served in his district for two years, is sitting with his board in an annual evaluation session. He has provided, at his board's request, a record of his achievement during the past year and the board makes reference to its statement of goals which had been established a year before. As you will see in the film, neither the board nor the superintendent has handled goal setting and the use of achievement data about the superintendent very skillfully. (That is why this is a training film.) In fact, as you'll see, the members of the board aren't at all clear, nor, perhaps, is Superintendent Sanders, why they are engaged in this evaluation. Neither are they clear about how it should be conducted. This is no suprise in light of my earlier comments on the continuing discussion about the respective roles of boards and administrators.

This board's contract with the superintendent requires annual evaluation, but does not specify how it should be conducted. One issue is very clear -- a raise in salary is at stake. (It ought to be pointed out that board member Charles Norris makes reference to having a certain principal fired. This remark concerns an incident which took place in an earlier film segment. Norris has been very anxious to rid the district of this principal.)

> At this point, Experience III of BOARD ACTION is shown. The board is taking up the question of whether or not to raise the Superintendent's salary. The decision is to be made after evaluation of his performance over the past year. One board member suggests hiring a consultant to do the evaluation. Another recommends a joint evaluation session, wherein Sanders is given the opportunity to evaluate the board. The President steers the group to deciding the issue at hand and looks to the goals agreed upon a year earlier as criteria for evaluating Sanders. So the board looks at test scores of students in various schools, professional improvement of the faculty, newly developed curriculum, etc. As these points come up, the board members discuss what is considered success and what results are closer to failure on the part of the superintendent. Then President Birns asks for a motion on the question of the superintendent's salary.

As I said before, evaluation is a part of the larger issue of the relationship between board and superintendent and that becomes clear in this segment of film. All the board members do not agree on: whether they are the superintendent's boss and their job is to set his salary, whether they are his colleagues and evaluation is a review of performance and is to be everyone's effort (such as Dr. Hunt suggests), whether the board is acting

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[1] Available at State College, Mississippi, 39762.

to guide the superintendent and this session is essentially an activity of constructive criticism, or whether the superintendent is to guide the board and the purpose of this session is to educate the board about events and issues of the past year.

Only one board member, Ed Reese, realizes they are trapped in this confusion and says, "I really don't know how well our superintendent is doing." He is the one person who states that his board does not know how to evaluate its superintendent. But his suggestion of hiring an outside consultant to do the job is inappropriate also. It is the school board's job to evaluate the administration of its policies.

By the time the board had reached this situation, it was impossible to evaluate well with any of the relationships I just described. The process had become frustrating and probably would eventually become destructive to the board, the superintendent and the children. It needn't have been that way. If board and superintendent had agreed to and understood the purpose of such a session and how to conduct such a session, when Sanders was hired, this would have been greatly facilitating and helpful to the functioning of the school district.

You may have noticed a reference made to "laundry list." This document is filled with numbers; "70% of staff attends courses for professional development...faculty masters degrees up from 53 to 59%...funding from grants, up 10%...building operations costs down 3%...." But no one is sure what these numbers measure. Take the number of masters degrees the faculty has acquired. The fact that they have the number is meaningless. Is this a trivial fact or is it a criterion by which the superintendent and board understood that Sanders was to be evaluated? Numbers included in a year-end report must be pertinent as measuring instruments against a criterion.

Not only is this board unclear about the data; it is also confused about its real goals. A year earlier, the board unanimously adopted goals, but these were couched in such trite phrases as "to raise the capabilities of our teaching staff," "to pay attention to our public reporting of test scores," "to measure our progress and know where we have succeeded or fallen short." Vague goals statements such as these make it impossible to evaluate success and failure.

So, first goals and objectives must be established, along with the methods and criteria for evaluating whether or not the goals and objectives have been attained. Then they must be written, either into policy or the administrator's contract.

I offer a couple of suggestions on good goal setting techniques. It is generally agreed that mutual goal setting improves performance. Participation by the superintendent in the setting of goals should foster favorable results. Secondly, write specific objectives. Writing in School Management, Donald J. McCarty states, "The Superintendent and his Board of Education must agree at the beginning of each year on a set of objectives which they jointly hope to accomplish. These goals ought to be couched in straightforward terms, as in the following examples: (1) An audit of the elementary reading program shall be undertaken in order to determine whether curricular changes are needed. (2) A study of dropouts shall be made: If corrective measures seem advisable, new approaches should be suggested." With specific objectives such as these, evaluation is a relatively easy undertaking. A bonus is the resultant common knowledge of where the school district is going and where it has been.

Performance in a school district is impossible to evaluate when nobody knows the rules. A lack of established evaluation methods and criteria is undoubtedly a primary cause of the high turnover rate among educational administrators. If the board/superintendent relationship, the larger issue, is clear, then evaluation can be accomplished easily, well and to

the benefit of the entire community.

A written record is a valuable asset in a superintendent's file and can be used in the future as a reference. If he continues to receive favorable evaluations, the superintendent is not apt to feel intimidated or threatened by a single unfortunate occurrence during the year. He or she will also understand what the job specifically entails. Thus, it is to your benefit to institute evaluation procedures within your district, if they are not already an established practice.

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